

Black Hills, South Dakota



Voices of Oglala Ancestors — Ceremony

Group of Sioux Warriors, Crow Reservation,
Montana, 1909

Left to right – Bird Necklace, Little Wound, Good
Lance, Jack Red Cloud, Iron Crow, Calico-Painted
Buckskin, George Sword, Iron Bull, Afraid of Bear

Photograph by Joseph K. Dixon Accn: 1962-08-1701

Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and
Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections



Voices of Oglala Ancestors — Ceremony

2010 Sun Dance men dancers prominently including Father Paul Steinmetz, S.J. (middle row, second from left), longtime priest on Pine Ridge and author of *Pipe, Bible and Peyote among the Oglala Lakota*



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Our ceremonies call to our Horse Nation relatives and they often answer by blessing us with their presence in the early morning hours as our Sun Dancers pray in inipi for a strong day of dancing and healing for the Oyate.

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Foreword



Sun Dance Painting, Catalog No. 50.2/4064
American Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology

We are all saddened that the Covid-19 pandemic kept us from our 2020 Sun Dance in the Black Hills, yet, we are reassured that the safety of our loved ones, our families and our peoples require special commitment and concentrated discipline.

The pandemic is an act of nature, of the Mother Earth itself, thus we respect it. It forced a hiatus on us, and the pause grants us time to reflect on our Sun Dance community and needs toward 2021 and beyond, much of which is communication.

Everything we know and practice in the sacred Sun Dance is founded on the teachings of our elder relatives, the grandfathers and grandmothers who kept alive the commitment to carry this wisdom to us through the generations.

Our foundation of that inherited wisdom is comprised of the explanations and legacies of

recent ancestors, Afraid of Bear (1842-1909), George Sword (1847-1910) and American Horse (1840-1908), whose lineal descendants and apprentices oversee and lead our Black Hills ceremony.

Long Visitor Holy Dance, Loretta's great-grandfather (listed in the Crazy Horse surrender ledger of May, 1877), provided spirituality to his family spanning generations, extending even to the present-day dancers. The family spirit permeating the gathering comes from Rex Long Visitor, patriarch of the family Loretta was born and raised in, who imparted the spirit and purpose of things to her as she grew up. The memory, teachings and certain knowledge of Loretta's mother, Beatrice Long Visitor Holy Dance, remain foundational to the ceremony.

Our Sun Dance line of belonging is dear and

clear. Our lead woman dancer and matron, Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook, was born two hundred feet from the one-room log home where Sword lived and wrote during his last 18 years of life. Descent and proximity brought us to the foundations of Lakota thinking, ancestral knowledge and spiritual practice.

The momentum of sun dancing for thirty-two consecutive years in the holy land brings us this booklet. In large measure, it was researched and reported to us by Keith Schrum, veteran dancer, **Hunka** member (adopted relative) of the Afraid of Bear family, and records management director for the Tiospaye. In the material, the ancestors directly pass down to us important indications, rules and understandings that originate in our deepest traditions. The specific information on ceremony and the use of the

sacred pipe were set down by George Sword, Afraid of Bear's younger brother.

In 1896, Sword had offered a new direction for the dissemination of the ancient knowledge. Previously, the most sacred knowledge was shared, sustained and strongly guarded by the tribal holy people. Sword considered and argued that they, the shamans and holy men, were "dying one by one and taking their knowledge with them."

George Sword, the Shirt Wearer's brother (the older Sword having been killed in battle), and spiritual grandfather to unfolding generations, reasoned "Future generations of Oglalas should know everything their ancestors believed and practiced; and so that all the world will know of the Oglala Gods." We offer the contents for our dancers' deepening understanding of these ways.

“Future generations of Oglalas should know everything their ancestors believed and practiced; and so that all the world will know of the Oglala Gods.”

- GEORGE SWORD
1896



Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook, below. Chief American Horse by J.A. Anderson, ca.1900, above



Foreword

That changed the minds of surviving shamans and holy men and prompted agreement to disclose tribal belief and ritual in writings discovered fifty years after they all died and resulting in many narratives now ensconced in scholarly books. Their foreknowledge was formidable in working to record what they knew, as American policy was turning increasingly hostile and ethnocidal to all aspects of Native culture and belief.

Lakota elders set out to save something of their spiritual knowledge in pursuit of their gifts to our generation. However, all Lakota rituals, ceremonies and public gatherings had been made illegal by the U.S. Code of Indian Offenses. Published on April 10, 1883, the code set forth “to criminalize anything formerly associated with armed hostilities against the U.S. government.” The objectively unjust, senseless and disgraceful act forced the dismantling of Lakota life, society and cohesion. The direct result of code enforcement was chaos, confusion and dysfunctions continuing today among the people. Economic realities in the reservation period continued so harshly that, today, the U.S. Bureau of Census ranks Oglala Lakota County as the third poorest of the 3,147 counties comprising America.

In the face of their culture being criminalized, assertions in defense of traditional spirituality exalt in the statements of tribal policy issued by headmen like American Horse. This ancestor had been one of four Shirt Wearers installed by the Oglala bands following the 1868 Treaty, and these were variously called “Owners of the People,” “Legislators,” and “Mediators.” Their statements on cultural matters defined tribal policy.

In Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1897, American Horse confronted lawmakers on the criminalization of Sun Dance. Testifying before Senator Henry L. Dawes, Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, he stated for the record, “As a people we have permanent convictions. I believed in the Sun Dance in the early days and I have been permanent in it. I believe we practice the religion more strictly than white people do, that is, we practice what we preach. Whether anyone condemns us or not, we do it.”

Then again, in September 1898, he answered the same chairman when asked whether Sun Dance was a “celebration or a ceremony.” The chief replied simply, “Sun Dance is a ceremony of which I have permanent convictions and the people have permanent convictions.”

And, again, in the same year he said to Dr. James Walker, a medical doctor practicing at Pine Ridge: “Anyone may dance the Sun Dance if he will do as the Oglalas do.” Afraid of Bear also said that he could perform ceremonies for a white man, saying “The first thing he must do is give me a gift.”

The intent to record and save their teachings for their future generations resounds for its forethought. It needed to be shared, first for the Lakota people and then, by the Lakota, to the other peoples of the world.

Loretta and I, sponsors of this ceremony, have sun danced each year of our 45-year marriage. Starting in 1975 at Crow Dog’s Paradise, we went on to Green Grass four years, then to several other places including our home community of Slim Buttes. We then sun danced ten years at **Mato Tipila** (Devil’s Tower) where the main prayer was for return of the Hills to the Lakota; and were accompanied each year by her father, two uncles and grandpa Harry Byrd. These elders then led us into the Black Hills proper saying we have “to use it or lose it.” They got us into the Wild Horse Sanctuary for our twenty years of ceremony there; and now, for

two years, we have sun danced at the summit of the Hills on property owned and permitted by the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe. Guided by intercessors David (87) and Joe (83) American Horse, grandsons of the 19th century chief, our ceremony follows these elders (with 103 dancers in 2019) in step with details given long ago by men who knew all about Oglala ceremony.

George Sword said he wanted all the world to know of the Oglala Gods. Our Sun Dance answers this wish; plus, we provide a way to not just know about the Gods, but to address them.



Thomas Kanatakeniate Cook
Executive Director
Afraid of Bear—American Horse Tiospaye

Preface



In the **Hunka Kiyapi** (naming ceremony), Joe American Horse speaks to Dayton Hyde as he receives a name. Looking on (at right) is Loretta Afraid of Bear. A short distance away, dressed in blue, is Loretta's mother, Beatrice Long Visitor Holy Dance. In the background, Sun Dancers surround the arbor to witness the event.

I have a prayer pipe and want to practice Lakota ways but do not have regular contact with anyone who has the same interest. I don't know anyone in my area who is Lakota or is familiar with those ways and customs. No sweat lodges. There is Sun Dance once a year but I cannot get to each one. Even if I could, it is a communal event with many components. There is so much to observe and absorb. I've picked up pieces of information but not enough to get a sense of the whole nature of pipe use within its own context.

For many years, I've felt isolated, wanting to practice a tradition but feeling inadequately equipped to do so, in spite of having been a dancer and participant in events for more than twenty years.

Knowing of our family's interest in George Sword, and keeping his influence alive, I started re-reading books in which he is a prominent figure and source of information, including *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Sword has much to say about traditional Lakota practice, and specifically the pipe – how to handle it, load it, light and smoke it, and even how to empty it. He also gave attention to offerings.

These two things – offerings and the pipe – are part of the Lakota rituals I've witnessed. These impressed me as being subjects to give attention to in personal practice. I read what Sword instructed and recorded notes, but in doing so, noted that he made reference to Lakota concepts and terms that traditional Lakota understand

but are new to those of us who are not Lakota. As we outlined Sword's instructions on the order and process of using a pipe in ceremony, we saw it was necessary to examine references he made to associated concepts, terms and definitions. The effort was needed so that everything would fit into larger context without missing pieces (hopefully). The result is that we are now able to integrate concepts, terms and procedures in a manner that offers greater meaning and clarity than I had previously. So, when Sword says to do something in a certain way, we can know more deeply what he meant and the purpose for it.

Our idea turned to compiling Sword's instructions into a single, small, easy-to-use booklet that serves as a personal guide and might help others who face the same challenge.

Keith Schrum
Archivist
Hunka member of the Afraid of Bear family



Introduction

Afraid of Bear, Crow Reservation, Montana, 1909
Photograph by Joseph K. Dixon Accn no. 1962-08-2032
Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Mathers Ethnographic Collections

Introduction

George Sword and James R. Walker

James R. Walker served as agency physician at the Pine Ridge Reservation from 1896–1914. While there, a number of Lakota elders and holy men befriended him. George Sword was among them, and he persuaded the others to instruct Walker in Lakota tradition and the teachings of the holy men. When they agreed to do so, Sword took responsibility for seeing that Walker understood the teachings.

Working with those elders and holy men, and with the help of translators, Walker amassed an amazing collection of stories, traditions and teaching. A Denver newspaper interviewed Walker in November 1919 and, in that interview, Walker stated he was indebted to many Lakota but most of all to George Sword.

James R. Walker's collected manuscripts provide the information used in this brief publication.

This publication is intended to serve as a guide for conducting personal ceremonies following Lakota tradition as shared by George Sword (1847-1910), especially practices related to the use of the prayer pipe and making offerings. Some who show interest in Lakota ways are fortunate to have an ongoing relationship with Lakota friends, knowledgeable individuals or access to a local community of like-minded-spirited individuals with whom to practice and share support. Others do not and find they must practice their spirituality on their own. This work has been produced with them in mind.

The topic of ceremonies is the primary focus, however, Sword's instructions include concepts and terms that are unfamiliar to those who are non-Lakota. To assist the reader in understanding both, additional subjects are included with notes to guide the reader in discovering information to broaden understanding and establish context.



George Sword, April 29, 1910
History Colorado Accn. 90.148.99

For example, George Sword makes reference to “**Wakan Tanka** and all the spirits.” To know what Sword intended, his descriptions of Wakan Tanka and **nagipi** (spirits) are included as well as a list of Lakota terms he used.

Some notes

Sword's teachings on ceremonies were shared in four interviews given to James Walker in September 1896 and were interpreted by Bruce Means or Bert Means. Another interview took place in July 1905 with Sword speaking in a group that included Bad Wound, No Flesh and Thomas Tyon, in which Tyon served as interpreter. Other translations appear in *Lakota Belief and Ritual* but without identifying an interpreter. It was likely DeMallie or Jahner who undertook the translation effort for those.



American Horse, undated
Photograph by William Henry Jackson
History Colorado Accn. 90.148.180

Walker's outline of Oglala mythology

James Walker made many notes of his observations and impressions while living among the Lakota and learning about their culture and life ways. What follows below is his description of the rank order of the Gods that comprise Wakan Tanka.

The category of the Gods as held by the shamans place them in four ranks with four in each rank, having prestige and precedence according to rank and place in rank.

The first rank is of the Superior Gods who are **Wi** (the Sun), the chief of the Gods; **Skan** (the Sky), the Great All-powerful Spirit; **Maka** (the Earth), the ancestress of all upon the world and provider for all; and **Inyan** (the Rock), the primal source of all things.

The second rank is of the Associate Gods who are **Hanwi** (the Moon), created by Wi to be his companion; **Tate** (the Wind), created by Skan to be his companion; **Unk** (Contention), created by Maka to be her companion, but who was cast into the waters and is the Goddess of the Waters and ancestress of all evil beings; and **Wakinyan** (Winged One), created by Inyan to be his active associate.

The third rank is of the four Subordinate Gods who are **Ta Tanka** (The Buffalo God), the patron of ceremonies, of health, and of provision; **Hu Nonp** (the Bear God), the patron of wisdom; **Wani** (the Four Winds), the vitalizer and weather; and **Yum** (the Whirlwind), the God of chance, of games and of love.

The fourth rank is of the Inferior Gods who are **Nagi** (the Spirit), **Niya** (the Ghost), **Sicun** (the Intellect), and **Nagila** (the immaterial self of irrational things).

The sixteen Gods are each but a personal manifestation of one Supreme Being and that being is Wakan Tanka, the Great Mystery.

“When I served Wakan Tanka, I did so with all my might. I will write of the old customs and ceremonies for you. I will write that which all the people knew.”

– **GEORGE SWORD**

September 5, 1896

George Sword in his own words

George Sword’s life is documented in a number of scholarly publications and the reader may learn of them by referring to the bibliography/sources.

Sword’s words and teachings appear in this different font style.

I know the old customs of the Lakotas and all of their ceremonies for I was a wicasa wakan (holy man or shaman). I have conducted the Sun Dance which is the greatest ceremony of the Lakota. I was a pejuta wicasa (medicine man) and a wakiconze (magistrate) so I know the customs of the camp and the march. I was also a blota hunka (commander of war parties). On my body are the scars received in battle, so I know the ceremonies of war.

Wakan Tanka

Wakan Tanka is like sixteen different persons, but each person is kan. Therefore, they are all only one. All the God persons have ton. Ton is the power to do supernatural things. Half of the good Gods are tan ton (have physical properties) and half are tan ton sni (have no physical properties). Half of those who are tan ton are tan ton yan (visible), and half of those

who are tan ton sni are tan ton yan sni (invisible). All the other Gods are visible or invisible as they choose to be. (See Lakota Terms and Definitions: Spirits).

All the evil Gods are visible or invisible as they choose to be. The invisible Gods never appear in a vision except to a shaman... except for the Sun Dance, the ceremonies for the visible and invisible Gods differ. The Sun Dance is a ceremony the same as if Wikan were both visible and invisible. This is because Wi is the chief of the Gods.

Wakan beings and language

Before moving to the topic of ceremonies, a useful and encouraging word should be noted. George Sword gave an interview on the subject of “Seeking a Vision” (translated by Bert Means). In it, he stated:

The Wakan beings are the superior beings... They can speak Lakota or any other language and they can use sign language.



Ceremonies

George Sword, undated
History Colorado Accn. 90.148.180

On the previous page, Sword described the roles he served among his people. He was also a Sun Dancer. After moving to the reservation, he was appointed the first Captain of Indian Police at Pine Ridge and was later promoted to Major. When he left the police, he became a judge in the Court of Indian Offenses.

In old times the Lakota believed that Wakan Tanka was everywhere all the time and observed everything that each one of mankind did and even knew what anyone thought, that he might be pleased or displeased because of something that one did. So the shamans taught the people ceremonies that would please the Wakan Tanka and gain their favor. These ceremonies of the Lakota are the ceremonies of the people. Smoke a pipe before the ceremony and then do the ceremony, so God will give attention.



After dancing has ended for the day, individuals may make prayers at the Tree of Life, *Can Wakan*. Standing at the arbor's west gate entry, a fireman burns cedar to cleanse and purify the arbor and the one offering prayer.

Pipe

Anyone may smoke a pipe for pleasure. It is a ceremony when it is done formally. When a Lakota undertakes anything in a formal manner he should first smoke the pipe. This is because the spirit in the pipe smoke is pleasing to Wakan Tanka and to all spirits. In any ceremony this is the first thing that is done. The spirit of the God is in the smoke of any pipe if the pipe is smoked in a proper manner.

Order to follow in smoking a pipe

- Prepare smoking material
- Load the pipe
- Light
- Show intention
- Smoke
- Empty contents/bury any unburned material

Preparation

Smoking material should be carefully prepared and mixed.

If one is to smoke for another ceremony, he should sing a song or pray while preparing smoking material.

Loading the pipe

Take pipe into left hand.

Hold the bowl so the stem does not point away from himself (keep the stem pointed toward the body).

Fill the bowl slowly, tamping material with a smoking stick

or with the first finger of the right hand.

A person may pray or sing when filling the pipe.

Lighting the pipe

The pipe should be lighted with a coal of fire and not with a blaze.

This is because the spirit in the fire is in the burning coals and the spirit in the blaze (flame) is going away from the fire.

Smoking the pipe

When a man smokes a pipe in a ceremony, he should think of that for which he is smoking and then God will think of the same thing.

When a pipe is filled and smoked properly, the spirit that is in the smoke goes with it into the mouth and body and then comes out and upward.

When the spirit is in the body, it soothes the spirit of the smoker and when it goes upward, it soothes God, so the God and the spirit are as friends.

If more than one (person) smokes in a ceremony, it should be done in the proper manner.

The pipe should be filled and lighted and then passed from one to another, each smoking a whiff or two.

The spirit in the smoke will sooth the spirits of all who smoke together and will be as friends and all think alike.

It should be passed until all contents are consumed and then emptied in the fire.

If the pipe stops burning before all contents burned, it should be emptied and filled before smoking again.

Emptying the pipe

If a man smokes alone in a ceremony, he should smoke the pipe until all the contents are consumed and then empty the ashes into the fire so all contents are consumed.

If more than one person is smoking, the pipe should be passed until all contents are consumed and then emptied in the fire.

If there is no fire, then empty contents onto the ground and cover with earth so that no one steps on them.

Incense

Smokes are customary in ceremonies.

Ceremonies

Wa Chang'a / Sweetgrass

In all ceremonies that have to do with Wakan Tanka, after smoking the pipe an incense of sweetgrass should be made.

The spirit that is in the smoke of the sweetgrass is pleasing to the Wakan Tanka and will incline him to hear the ceremony with favor.

Make smoke with sweetgrass in a proper manner. Making smoke with incense is wazilya (incensing).

Sprinkle on burning coals so it makes smoke.

Singing or praying while doing this will make it more pleasing to God.

The incense is distasteful to all evil beings and thwarts their powers.

Peji Go'ta / Sage

After an incense of sweetgrass, there may be an incense of sage in the same manner.

The smoke of sage will drive away all evil if it is made in this manner: The sage should be put on burning coals of fire so that it will smoke and, while making smoke, one should pray to the evil to go away.

Evil beings hate the smoke of sage.

The spirit of the smoke of the sage is very offensive to all evil beings and they fly away from it.

They fear the herb sage and will not stay where it is.

If anyone carries sage, or keeps it near, evil beings fear to come near such a one.

Wi'site / Cedar

The spirit of anything is released in the smoke as it is burned. The life, the essence, properties and power of the cedar tree reside in its leaves; and its smoke cleanses and purifies whatever or whoever is being smudged with it. It is the means by which to please the primal God Inyan, the Rock, and to carry thoughts and prayers out into the world beyond the human senses.

Because he was rock, Inyan could not move, so he made Wakinyan (Thunderbeing, Thunderstorm) who could move but he was shapeless.

According to Lakota storytelling and myth, Wakinyan's glance was lightning and his voice thunder; wrapped in clouds, he flies over the world searching for evil things to destroy and he works with Tate (the wind) to cleanse the world.

The cedar tree is a favorite of Wakinyan and he never strikes it with lightning; its smoke pleases him.

When a thunderstorm is coming, one should make incense of cedar leaves to propitiate Wakinyan. Cedar smoke cleanses and purifies anything and anyone smudged with it and carries words and intentions to the spirit world as it travels upwards. It is used universally in Native ceremonies.

Offerings

A Lakota can secure the favor of Wakan Tanka, or of any spirit, if he will make a suitable offering.

The offering may be made in either of three ways.

Abandoned

An offering may be abandoned in the name of the one to whom it is offered.

If abandoned, the spirit goes to the one to whom the offering is made, but the thing itself remains as it was before it was offered.

Most offerings are made by abandoning them because the things offered belong to the first who take possession of them.

In this manner the needy may be helped.

Given

To one whose hands are painted red (generally a shaman) or it can be given to anyone whose hands are painted red.

As with an abandoned offering, the spirit goes to the one to whom the offering is given and the thing offered remains as it was.

Burned

The spirit of anything is released in the smoke of it.

A wosnapi (offering to God or a spirit) may be made by burning the thing with a ceremony making it an offering.

Burn the offering in the name of the one to whom the offering is made.

If the offering is burned, its spirit goes away in the smoke and the thing offered is destroyed.

If smoking the pipe to make an offering, point the stem of the lighted pipe toward the one to whom the smoke is offered.

A taboo offering

An offering is taboo to the one who makes it, except offerings of food and drink.

One may make an offering of these by putting a bit on the ground and then eat or drink the remainder.

Ceremonies



Sun Dance Drawing, Detroit Institute of Arts

Lakota Terms & Definitions



Chief American Horse, 1899
Photograph by F. A. Rinehart
Library of Congress

Wakan

Wakan means very many things. The Lakota understands what it means from the things that are considered wakan; yet sometimes its meaning must be explained. It is something that is hard to understand.

Anything that acquires ton is wakan because it is the power of the spirit or quality that has been put into it.

Every object in the world has a spirit and that spirit is wakan. Thus the spirit of the tree or things of that kind, while not like the spirit of man, are also wakan.

Wakan comes from wakan beings. These wakan beings are greater than mankind in the same way that mankind is greater than animals. They are never born and they never die. They can do many things that mankind cannot do. Mankind can pray to wakan beings for help. There are many of these beings but all are of four kinds. The word **Wakan Tanka** means all of the wakan beings because they are all as if one. **Wakan Tanka Kin** signifies the chief or leading Wakan being which is the Sun. However, the most powerful of the Wakan beings is **Nagi Tanka**, the Great Spirit who is also **Taku Skanskan**.

Mankind is permitted to pray to the Wakan beings. If their prayer is directed to all the good Wakan beings they should pray to Wakan Tanka; but if the prayer is offered to only one of these beings, then the one addressed should be named.

Wakan Tanka is pleased with music. He likes to hear the drums and the rattles. When any of the Wakan beings hear the drum and the rattles they always give attention. He is fond of the smoke of sweetgrass and evil Wakan beings are afraid of the smoke of sage. All of the Wakan beings both good and evil, are pleased with the smoke of the pipe (source: *Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies*).

Ton

Wakan Tanka is like sixteen different persons. They are all only the same as one. All the God persons have **ton**.

- Ton is the power to do supernatural things.
- Ton of **Wi** is in fire. It cannot be imparted.
- Ton of **Wohpe** is in the smoke from the pipe and in the incense of sweetgrass (and) cannot be imparted.
- Ton of **Skan** is most powerful. It can be

imparted only by very wise shamans and with a great deal of ceremony.

· **Hanwi**, **Wakinyan**, **Nagi** and **Niya** have ton but they cannot be imparted.

· Ton of **Tate**, **Tatob** and **Yumni** is same as Skan.

· The ton of all the other Gods each can be imparted to anything suitable.

Good Gods and Bad Gods

This section was compiled from an interview that included George Sword, Bad Wound, No Flesh and Thomas Tyon.

Good Gods

Wikan	Sun
Hanwikan	Moon
Taku Skanskan (Skan)	That Which Moves (Sky)
Tatekan	Wind
Tob Kin	The Four Winds
Yumnikan	Whirlwind
Makakan	Earth
Wohpe	The Beautiful Woman
Inyankan	Rock
Wakinyan	Thunderbeing
Tatankakan	Buffalo Bull
Hunonpakan	Grizzly Bear
Wanagi	Human Spirit

Woniya	Human Life
Nagila	Nonhuman Spirit
Wasicunpi	Guardian Spirits

Bad Gods
Iyo (Iya, Ibom)
 He is chief of the Evil Gods and he is the evil Wakan Tanka.
Gnaskinyan
 Crazy Buffalo
 He is most to be feared of the Evil Gods

because he appears as the Good Buffalo God and persuades the people to do all kinds of evil things.
Anog Ite
 Double Face
Untehi
 Water Monsters
Mini Watu
 Water Spirits
Can Oti
 Tree Dwellers
Ungla
 Goblins
Gica
 Dwarfs
Nagila Sica
 Evil Nonhuman Spirit

Kan and its derivatives

Kan – anything that is old or has existed for a long time. May also mean a strange or wonderful thing or that which cannot be comprehended or that should not be questioned. It may mean a sacred or supernatural thing.

Words that may appear before kan: **a, wa, wo, ya, yu**

a – that which is mysterious or supernatural

wa – that something or someone is something or does something.

Example: when used before kan, it makes the word **wakan**. It means that which is kan.

wo – is consecrated to the **wa kan** or for ceremonial purposes.

Wo is from two words: **wo** and **on**. **On** means relative to or of that kind. For example: **on kan (onkan)** means that the thing spoken of related to something kan.

ya – means to change a thing or person and make it different from what it was before. When one says ya kan it means that the thing spoken of is made kan by changing it.

yu – means a thing or person is sacred while being or doing something.

Words that may appear after kan: **la, pi**

la – means a little like but not exactly alike. For example, **kan la** means that the thing spoken of is almost kan.

pi – means more than one, or that which is done by many (for example: **kan pi** means things that are kan).

Nagipi

There are many kinds of **Nagipi** (spirits). All the spirits of one kind are the same as one spirit. There are four classes of spirits and four kinds within each.

The Wakan Tanka is a spirit but it has four kinds. It is called Wakan because no man can understand it. The **Taku Wakan** is a spirit and it has four kinds. It is called Taku Wakan because it is akin to Wakan Tanka. Wakan Tanka and Taku Wakan may be called Taku Wakan because they are akin to each other. When a prayer is made to Wakan Tanka, it is made to Taku Wakan also.

Wakan Tanka and Taku Wakan are spirits (nagipi) but many have material bodies. Some do not. These are all spirits that do good to humankind.

A Lakota man has a spirit that goes to the spirit world and never dies. He has other spirit-selves.

His breath of life is like a spirit. His strength is like a spirit. His influence is like a spirit. These are all spirits but when his body dies, they go to where they came from and are no more.

This much is known to the people: Taku Wakan (all kindred spirits) may affect the affairs of mankind, therefore, the Lakota should secure their favor by ceremonies, by offerings and by prayer.

A Lakota may learn the will of Taku Wakan by seeking a vision (**hanblapi**). A holy man should teach how to do this.

The Wakan Tanka that have material bodies are the Sun, the Earth, the Rock, the Moon. Those which have no material bodies are **Taku Skanskan** (the Sky), **Tate** (the Wind), **Wakinyan** (the Winged) and **Wohpe** (the Meteor). The superior Wakan Tanka are the Sun, the Sky, the Earth and the Rock. The inferior Wakan Tanka are the Moon, the Wind, the Winged and the Meteor.

The Taku Wakan have no material bodies. They may appear to sight as bodies but they are like shadows. They are the Wakan of love and of wisdom and of weather and of games. This is one class. The other class is the spirits of mankind and the ghosts of mankind (**niyapi**) and the strength of mankind and the spirit-like

of animal and things.

The Evil Spirits are many kinds but they are not classed. There is one Wakan Tanka who is evil (**Iyo**, also called **Iya** or **Ibom**).

Nagilapi

Nagilapi are the niyapi of animals and the smoke of inanimate things. Nagila is the same as the ton of anything other than **Tobtob Kin**. Each animate or inanimate thing has a **nagi** or a nagila. The nagi of an animate thing is its spirit and of an inanimate thing that grows from the ground is its smoke. This is the potency of anything.

Inipi and Hanbleyapi

George Sword, Thomas Tyon, William Garnett, Thunder Bear and John Blunt Horn provided a lengthy interview to Walker covering several subjects. Excerpts related to the **Inipi** (Sweat Lodge) and **Hanbleyapi** (Vision Quest) appear below.

Inipi is the oldest and most revered ceremony. It drives away all evil things. This ceremony should be had before undertaking anything of importance.

Wakan Tanka is pleased by Inipi, for it strengthens the life and purifies the body.

Hanblapi

It is the custom of all the Lakotas to seek a vision when they are to undertake some important thing or wish for something earnestly.

In addition, the elders who joined him in instructing Walker stated seeking a vision could be done in different ways.

Different terms are used to identify the ceremony:

Hanblapi, Seek a Vision

Hanbleyapi, Vision Quest

Hanblecheya, Crying for a Vision

To seek a vision a Lakota must think about it all the time. He must smoke the pipe and sing and pray.

Regarding a vision, the following may happen:

The **hanble** (vision) is a communication from Wakan Takan or a spirit to one of mankind.

It may come at any time.

It may come in any manner.

It may come to anyone.

It may be relative to the one who receives it or to another.

It may be communicated in Lakota (and a

Lakota will understand it).

It may be communicated in **hanbloglaka** (language of the spirits. If so, a shaman should interpret).

It may be only by sight or sounds, not of a language.

It may be sent directly from the one giving it or by a messenger.

To seek a vision, first do an Inipi.

Can Wakan

Forty-five years ago as we were preparing to sun dance for the first time, my father-in-law Larue Afraid of Bear said to us during a sweat lodge “we don’t know if God is a man or a woman or a tree; we just as well pray to the tree.” He added “the old folks used to say as much.”

Can Wakan, also known as the Sacred Tree, Holy Tree, Tree of Life, Flowering Tree is at the center of sun dancing. Having become sacred by the ceremony of taking, dressing and standing it, the Tree connects the human spirit to the natural world so persons may directly acknowledge, greet and say thank you to the life spirits behind what’s perceived by the human senses.

Anything spiritual needs a physical carrier, and this is what the Tree provides by the Great Mystery itself.

The Flowering Tree opens “the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world.” (Black Elk, 1930).

The Tree manifests God’s life, wherein all sixteen of the Oglala Gods (comprising Wakan Tanka) are present and attentive. These God persons are all part of human life. Centered on the Tree and emanating from it, the ceremony connects the spirits of the dancers with the spirit world within, around and beyond themselves.

Wicasa Yatapika

Raising and titling selected men to serve and protect the people, the **Wicasa Yatapika** (Men they Praise or Shirt Wearers), is an ancient Lakota institution useful in nomadic government. Special shirts were made and decorated with locks of the people’s hair, so it could hang from them, to be carried and considered by these most trusted and dedicated warrior leaders.

At Bear Butte, in 1857, a grand council of the Lakota tribes appointed the Shirt Wearers as head warriors to lead resistance against white intrusions on their lands. Decisions made by chiefs and councils were implemented by the Shirt Wearers who wielded highest authority.

In 1868 following the Ft. Laramie Treaty, which was to have checked the continual white encroachment on the frontier, Oglala bands installed four Shirt Wearers as “great warriors.” These were Crazy Horse, American Horse, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Sword. The appointments were for life.

Sword was killed in battle with a Crow in 1876. The following year, his chieftainship transferred to his brother, called Enemy Bait. Along with the title and its responsibilities, he assumed his brother’s name, “Sword.” He became George Sword.

In the following years, U.S. Government policy sought to destroy Native culture; however, the Shirt Wearers continued to serve their people and in the ongoing negotiated relations with the federal government. Their legacy lives on in their family inheritors in the Afraid of Bear and American Horse extended kinships, who still honor the tradition of Shirt Wearer as a family value, and endeavor to offer useful and humble leadership among the Lakota people.

Sun Dance 2007. Our female lead dancer, Anpetu Luta Win, Red Day Woman (Loretta Afraid of Bear-Cook) stands next to two of the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers, Beatrice and Rita Long Visitor Holy Dance, Loretta's mother and aunt (2nd row, right).



Bibliography / Sources

Lakota Belief and Ritual by James R. Walker (LBR). Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980, 1991. Published in cooperation with the Colorado Historical Society. (The Colorado Historical Society is now History Colorado.)

The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota by James R. Walker. New York: The American Museum of Natural History, 1917.

George Sword is cited in numerous books, journals and scholarly articles. Those interested in learning about him will find the following works informative:

Lakota Myth by James R. Walker. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Published in cooperation with the Colorado Historical Society. (The Colorado Historical Society is now History Colorado.)

In addition to the above, a new publication presents recent scholarship focused on George Sword. *George Sword's Warrior Narratives: Compositional Process in Lakota Oral Tradition* by Delphine Red Shirt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.